

Forming Plurals

The plural form of a noun or pronoun refers to more than one person, place, or thing. Most common nouns follow the basic rule of forming their plurals by adding *s* (e.g., students, instructors, buildings, papers, etc.). Additional rules are applied when forming the plurals of words ending in specific letters.

- ✓ Nouns that end in *-s*, *-sh*, *-ch*, *-x*, or *-z* form their plurals by adding *-es* (e.g., box → boxes).
 - ✓ For words ending in *-y*, look at the letter that precedes *-y*; if it is a vowel, just add *-s* (e.g., attorney → attorneys); if *-y* is preceded by a consonant, change *-y* to *-i* and add *-es* (family → families).
 - ✓ For nouns ending in *-o*: When a word ending in *-o* is related to music or art, just add *-s* (e.g., piano → pianos). When the final *-o* is preceded by a vowel, just add *-s* (e.g., radio → radios). When the short form of a word is used, just add *-s* (e.g., photo → photos). When the final *-o* is preceded by a consonant, add *-es* (e.g., cargo → cargoes).
 - ✓ No consistent rules apply for words ending in *-f* or *-fe*. Consult a dictionary to confirm correct form (e.g., thief → thieves; knife → knives; roof → roofs; chief → chiefs).
 - ✓ Compound nouns: In compound nouns, make the most important word plural (e.g., editors in chief; roommates).
 - ✓ Nouns that change basic form: Some words change their basic forms when they become plural (e.g., man → men; mouse → mice).
 - ✓ One form: Some plural nouns retain their singular forms and are spelled the same whether singular or plural (e.g., deer, politics, odds, corps, corn, fish, sheep).
 - ✓ Numbers in combination: When using numbers as modifiers, do not use their plural form (two dozen donuts; five hundred participants).
 - ✓ Special plurals: Apostrophes are used to form plurals of lowercase letters and lowercase abbreviations (e.g., p's and q's, c.o.d.'s), but not capital abbreviations (e.g., CPAs).
 - ✓ Courtesy titles: Mr. → Messrs.; Miss → Misses; Dr. → Drs; Ms. → Mses. or Mss.; Mrs. → Mmes.
 - ✓ Latin words: For some Latin words ending in *-um*, the plural is formed by changing the *-um* to *-a* (e.g., curriculum/curricula). However, not all words ending in *-um* follow this rule. Latin words ending in *-us* are made plural by changing the *s* to *i* (e.g., cactus/cacti, syllabus/syllabi). Again, not all words ending in *-us* follow this pattern. When in doubt, check a dictionary.
- *Note regarding subject-verb agreement:* Some nouns that end in *-s* are always singular and take singular verb forms (e.g., civics, aerobics). Other nouns ending in *-s* are always plural and take plural verb forms (e.g., credentials, premises).

Practice

Form the plural of the following singular nouns.

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|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. child _____ | 6. loaf _____ |
| 2. studio _____ | 7. laundry _____ |
| 3. solo _____ | 8. inch _____ |
| 4. foot _____ | 9. IRA _____ |
| 5. potato _____ | 10. sister-in-law _____ |

11. salmon _____
12. series _____
13. cupful _____
14. secretary _____
15. trout _____
16. CEO _____
17. criterion _____
18. belief _____
19. Ms. _____
20. bacterium _____

21. alumnus _____
22. crisis _____
23. boy _____
24. hypothesis _____
25. fish _____
26. knife _____
27. kite _____
28. shelf _____
29. soda _____
30. corn _____

Answers: 1. children 2. studios 3. solos 4. feet 5. potatoes 6. loaves 7. laundries 8. inches 9. IRAs
10. sisters-in-law 11. salmon 12. series 13. cupfuls 14. secretaries 15. trout 16. CEOs 17. criteria or criterions 18.
beliefs 19. Mses. 20. bacteria 21. alumni 22. crises 23. boys 24. hypotheses 25. fish 26. knives 27. kites 28. shelves
29. sodas 30. corn